

INTERVIEW OF KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH
INTERVIEWER IS KAREN BREWSTER
SEPTEMBER 6, 2016
IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
PART 1

KAREN BREWSTER: And this is Karen Brewster and I am here with Kenny Smith and we are in Anchorage, Alaska at the Park Service offices and today is September 6, 2016 and this is for the Wrangell Ethnology History Project. Kenny, thank you very much for coming down here today. Just to start things off maybe you could tell me a little bit about yourself. I know that your father was Mudhole Smith, but that is all I know. So and that -- so were you born in Cordova?

KENNY SMITH: That is correct. I was born in Cordova. I always used to like to say I was conceived in McCarthy, but then I got to figuring that out and I was about nine months off.

KAREN BREWSTER: What year were you born?

KENNY SMITH: 1940. The folks lived in McCarthy in 1938 and the first part of 1939 and that is why I say I was almost conceived in McCarthy, but then they moved down to Cordova in April of -- late April of '39.

KAREN BREWSTER: And can you remind me again which flying service your father was flying for?

KENNY SMITH: It was Cordova Air Service. It had its beginning in 1934 and that was -- that was a result of a fellow by the name of Merrick Kirkpatrick who had come up here in 1930 to work for Gillam at Copper Center. A temporary job came up for him because Gillam had cracked up his first Swallow aircraft and Kirkpatrick was -- had a wealth of experience. He was superintendent of the Swallow Plant in Kansas. He was a pilot. He was a mechanic, but he had recently gotten married to -- and him and his wife were looking for more adventurous stuff so he quit. He had quit Swallow. They were going to China, but war was imminent there so they bagged that and they came to Alaska. And he wound up working for Kirkpatrick there and fixed that Swallow and, but then Kirkpatrick had promised to try to get him into flying a little bit and so that happened. And during the next three or four years he would send up -- Kirkpatrick down to Cordova to live down there and fly, but interesting enough it was only during the winter because they didn't -- he didn't have anything on floats and there was really no -- no airstrip in Cordova. There was one out at Mile 19 on the railroad, but there was no road out there. So they would operate on skis, but once spring came that was that. And well, it was along about 1933, I think it was late '33 that Kirkpatrick and his wife went back down to Kansas to visit relatives and that maybe find employment again down there. Well, you know what was going on in 1933, it was devastation, you know, the Grapes of Wrath and everything else. And they turned around and headed right back to Alaska. But the businessmen in Cordova had a taste of an air service so by '34 they decided to start one of their own and Kirkpatrick had went up and flying for Noel Wein out of Fairbanks for a while. And so they got ahold of him. Him and his wife went to Cordova and that is when they started.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, what is your first memory of McCarthy?

KENNY SMITH: My first memory of McCar -- well, my first memory of McCarthy, my name is Kenneth, but they called me Kenny and so my first memories are pretty young. They were always talking about Kennicott or Kenny Lake, you know, and every time somebody would say Kennicott I would pick up are they trying to talk to me. So that is my first memory. But my first memory of seeing the place is in 1952. When dad bought that Hubrick Photo Shop which is the main part of McCarthy Lodge now where they have the dining room. He bought that in anticipation of flying tourists into the McCarthy Kennicott area.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

KENNY SMITH: Then he so he basically started McCarthy Lodge. They bought a couple other structures there as well.

KAREN BREWSTER: And was he -- did that business take, excuse the pun, take off with bringing tourists in?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it did. It was pretty widely acclaimed you know. National Geographic had an edition of Alaska I think it was 1956 and they even had pictures of the Kennicott Express that the airline had fixed to take tourists from McCarthy up to Kennicott to see the place on the rails because there was -- there was actually the old wagon road which exists today you could get down there. But the rails were still in between Kennicott and McCarthy. Incidentally, Howard Knutson who you are going to interview he worked -- he was partnered up with another fellow and they actually operated that lodge the first couple years and Howard was instrumental in setting up the Kennicott Express, kind of a little train, you know, pulled it by a Model A Ford and a bunch of cars the passengers sit in it behind it up to Kennicott and back. And also they had to bring -- by that time dad had acquired larger airplanes, DC-3's, (inaudible) and they were taking -- they would do these roaring 20 trips out of Anchorage primarily and go up for the weekend. Sometime the people would doll up in and they would fly into McCar -- May Creek and then they would pick them up and take them to McCarthy and they would stay there one night in McCarthy Lodge or two nights. And then they would go up to Kennicott. What -- the reason and this all started in '52 he had bought the place, but he was trying to -- he was getting these larger airplanes and that is really when trans -- Cordova Air Service more into Cordova Airlines.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, with the bigger planes?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah and the headquarters became in Anchorage, the main line division, but he would needed -- he didn't have a route structure strong enough to support those larger airplanes. So he was trying to dream up gimmicks to use the airplanes at least in the summer. That is what happened there. And so it worked out fairly well and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know how he advertised to get clients?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it was -- in fact, to this day there is -- they bought a lot of ads. They had a short movie out on it. They had brochures, even -- he even supported a stock car here in Anchorage. A stock car racing was real popular and he had written on the side Fly Cordova and then it had a ghost on the side and Kennicott, Alaska or something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: So promoting the ghost town?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Aspects of McCarthy and Kennicott?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right. It was pretty good turf. But any rate --

KAREN BREWSTER: Did he promote it in the Lower 48?

KENNY SMITH: No, no, nah. It did get some attention in the Lower 48 because over the years they have seen more people come up and took it.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it was mostly Alaskans?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mostly Alaskans who took it?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, mostly Anchorageites because it was -- it had the population base and people got into that and then they had a lot of -- they had walked out of Kennicott and McCarthy pretty much. Left the clothes behind and all that so it was all the gowns and the gals liked to dress up in all that stuff. So it was -- it was quite an experience and the reason why -- another reason why they were able to do that is Kennicott, as you know, closed in 1938, but they had watch persons and specifically --

KAREN BREWSTER: Caretakers?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, for Kennicott, specifically a man and wife team. They lived down in McCarthy and they would make sure nobody did anything there that was amiss and if somebody wanted to go up to Kennicott and it was okay with the corporation then they would take them up. And they did that pretty much from '38 and they laid them off in '52. So after '52 you could go on up and that couple were friends of the folks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember their name?

KENNY SMITH: I wish I did. Jim Edwards bought their house in downtown McCarthy which is about where the Lancaster Hotel is right now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

KENNY SMITH: It was -- there was really very few people in McCarthy and none in Kennicott in almost a 20 year stretch. They --

KAREN BREWSTER: And your dad knew about it 'cause he had been flying into there?

KENNY SMITH: Well, yeah, Cordova Air Service had the mail runs throughout the Interior and he had a pilot base in Chitina. You could drive into Chitina even back then. You couldn't get any further. The rails were still in between Chitina and Kennicott pretty much.

KAREN BREWSTER: But the bridge across the Copper was --

KENNY SMITH: It was gone and all the trestles were collapsing or had collapsed. So it was -- the only way to get to McCarthy was to fly.

KAREN BREWSTER: And were there people who lived in McCarthy who had airplanes and moved back and forth or did they always -- they always took the mail plane?

KENNY SMITH: They always took the mail plane with the exception of Edwards. Jim Edwards had his own airplane and he even took the mail plane at times.

KAREN BREWSTER: And he got there in what like '55?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah. Jim, I think, made his first trip up in '53, but he didn't -- he had also come to Cordova. He worked for the Public Utilities down there and so he was kind of back and forth, but he acquired some of the property there and so I remember I was still in high school in '58 and I remember I was watching the office one day and Jim was -- I believe it was the early spring and Jim had come down and was working for the utilities (inaudible) so he was bouncing back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, did Jim ever work for your dad as a pilot?

KENNY SMITH: Yes, but not Cordova Airlines. Cordova Airlines merged -- we had a bush division which was based in Cordova and we merged with Alaska Airlines in 195 --1968,

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 3 of 17

but dad kept playing around. This is a long story so I won't go into it all, but dad kept playing around. You couldn't get him away from airplanes. So and my brother had -- he bought a lot of the bush stuff from Cordova -- from Alaska Airlines. And so Jim came on about that time. Jim was living up there and dad first -- well, my brother got out of it -- the air taxi business and it was Chitina Air Service they called it, but it was based in Cordova. And when he did that, dad -- we couldn't keep dad away from them, so he took it over and he hired Jim then.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, so that was in the 60's.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, and then, oh, wait a minute, wait a minute, I take that back, I take that back. No, it was my brother who first hired Jim. Okay and that was in the late 60's and early 70's because I was still flying a little bit of the bush then. I had quit Alaska Airlines and went back to bush flying. So I was flying out of Cordova in '70 and '71 and or '71 and '72 and Jim and me and my brother Wayne and Terry Kennedy from Cordova. We were the pilots for Cordova Air Service. Or no, for Chitina Air Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so tell me a little bit about your personal story and you grew up in Cordova and now you ended up as a pilot. What -- how did you get from A to B?

KENNY SMITH: Oh, well, I, you know, yeah, dad owned Cordova Air Service. After the war he wound up buying Cordova Air Service. It pretty much was shut down and then he -- it was mostly bush there for a bunch of years still and then I told you about the big airplanes around '52. So, you know, I was raised in Cordova and we pretty much stayed to Cordova. In those days polio was rampant and if and especially here in Anchorage in the summer. And so dad and ma didn't like to bring us kids up to Anchorage during the polio years. So we didn't start even though dad had an apartment here so we just didn't start. So I was in Cordova most of the time and after I got into high school he wanted me to work in the hangars that he had acquired which is the Cordova Air, so I worked there a bunch of years. A fellow by the name of Cal Ward taught me how to fly. He was the chief bush pilot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you know you wanted -- always wanted to be pilot your dad's a pilot or?

KENNY SMITH: Oh, it was kind of a -- I got out of high school in '58 and went up to your college up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: UAF, yeah.

KENNY SMITH: Now some even call UAF, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: University of Alaska.

KENNY SMITH: So I didn't do too good that first year, except for having fun and dad convinced me -- I already knew how to fly, but I didn't have all my ratings and the commercial taken. Dad talked me into going down to Texas to the biggest flying school in the world which he had went to and that was American Flyers. An incidentally Howard, who was going to be my boss up in the Interior the next year, he had to go down there because the FAA decided to make the airline, even though you are flying to bush have instrument ratings, even though a bush pilot didn't have to have an instrument rating back then. You do now. But any rate so I'm down there and just finishing up my commercial and my dad calls me and tells me you are going to have an instrument rating so you are going to have to stay down there longer. And then the next thing I know Howard shows up and so that's.

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 4 of 17

KAREN BREWSTER: So when did you start flying commercially?

KENNY SMITH: Nineteen six or I got -- I started flying under Howard's tutelage in the early spring of 1960.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, so did you ever go and live in McCarthy or you just went in and out as the pilot?

KENNY SMITH: Just in and out. In fact, in fact Howard wound up being Cordova Air Service regional area pilot and he run the station at Chitina which we could -- Chitina had an airport big enough for a DC-3 too. But prior to Howard there was a guy by the name of Jack Wilson and he went and made his own air service and he went off much to dad's chagrin. So dad got Howard. I mean Howard could take over. Prior to Jack Wilson was a fellow by the name of Herb Haley who was a friend of dad's and he was older than dad, an older pilot than dad from the Kansas days. So there is more to that story, but anyway there was a long line there. Well, anyway, dad loved the country up there and wanted me and Howard is a good -- a good man. I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for some of the stuff he taught me. So at any rate that is how I -- that was my first. And after a few years there I got moved back down to the coast and flew the sound and that. Then when Howard took off for the mining venture then by that time I was married and we went up and took over the Chitina operation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So what are some of the important things Howard taught you in terms of flying that saved your life?

KENNY SMITH: Okay, well, we had -- I don't know this didn't save my life, but here is what I use much to my daughter's chagrin. One time we had to run the fish camps too. Cordova Air Service -- Airlines had two fish camps. One up at Tebay Lakes and one on Hanagita Lake which is in the Chugach side of the Chitina River Valley. One has got pure strain of rainbow in it and that is Tebay. At any rate, they weren't really big, big Lake Clark type deals, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: But you flew fishermen -- sport fishermen in?

KENNY SMITH: Sport fishermen in there and, you know, August is a big time for -- with hunters, mostly sheep hunters, but at any rate, we did that all year and then Howard and I both had to fix the outboard motors and stuff like that, you know, and make sure the camps -- we usually have Tebay the biggest of the two we had a lodge person hired, some young kid or something. But at any rate one time -- the first year I was up there I ate with Howard and Deanna a lot. Deanna made dinner for me. And I was really unhappy one day because somebody did something stupid, one of the customers and ruined -- broke this or whatever, and I was moaning to Howard about it. And Howard said Kenny, Kenny, how many times I got to tell you this? People are no damn good. I took a version of that with my two oldest granddaughters and I told them this I know men. Oh, men are rule number one about men they're no damn good. Number two, refer to one. (Laughter) And I get my daughter, but any rate that is from Howard. But actually where he really did help me he was a strong believer in not assuming anything, especially in aviation. And I went on after my flying career really -- I stayed in aviation I was with the airport system for the state for almost twenty-five years. And I had a long stretch of training airport managers up here and I used that a lot. Howard's don't assume anything. I could tell you a bunch of stories in one case where it really did save my skin, but, you know, there is no

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 5 of 17

room for assumptions, you know. Don't just assume you got a full tank of gas. You better open that cap and look down inside or, you know, stuff like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right and don't assume the weather is going to stay the same way, right?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right, yeah. And he had -- there is a couple others. He had a saying that you establish in your head a margin of safety. I bet he don't even remember this. Establish in your mind so and don't deviate from that, you know, especially with the weather is a good example. If you decide I am going to let the weather get down this low and then I make 180 degree turn in getting out, you do that. You don't say, well, today I am going to squeeze a little further. So you know stuff like that I got from Howard.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that sounds like good advice.

KENNY SMITH: It was. It was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now you were talking before about the airstrip at May Creek.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So in the 50's when your dad was flying people in the airstrip was over at May Creek?

KENNY SMITH: Yes. Uh-huh. The big one.

KAREN BREWSTER: The big one.

KENNY SMITH: For the big airplanes. We continued to use for the light airplanes we continued to use the McCarthy airstrip.

KAREN BREWSTER: And tell me again where the McCarthy strip was?

KENNY SMITH: It is parallel right in town almost. It is parallel to McCarthy Creek on the other side.

KAREN BREWSTER: On the other side of the creek?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

KENNY SMITH: You go down and you go across that bridge. You walk to the top of the hill and it is there. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

KENNY SMITH: In fact, the Park Service kind of owns the north -- the western portion of that runway and there is the old Cordova Air Service log cabin there that has got a lot of notoriety.

KAREN BREWSTER: So when he would land at May Creek, how did he get his tourists over to McCarthy?

KENNY SMITH: Well, see that is where Howard and a guy by the name of Zach Brown came in back in the 50's, early 50. So they -- the airline flew in a couple Jeeps. You know you could get a Jeep inside a DC-3, but there was -- there was Model A Fords, Model T Fords actually because I don't they use any D's, but they modified Model T Fords so they could run them over to May Creek. Now this is a 34 mile round trip and they had the Jeeps and then there was like I thought it was a '36 Chevrolet that was brand spanking new left behind. My friend Dave Siren (phonetic) who is an antique, he says, yeah, that was right, but it was a Ford. But he might have used that. There are a few things other than that and then they -- so they would go over meet the DC-3, bring everybody over. They would leave the DC-3 there overnight. They call it ROAN, remain overnight. So the crew and everybody would come on over to McCarthy and then the next morning, you know, they

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 6 of 17

had already eaten at the lodge and the next morning they would take the speeder. Oh, in addition to there being the Model A, they had speeders. The railroad had what you call speeders. They were -- it is -- they were little cars with a flathead Ford engine in them or something and they were on rails -- there were rails. And they were really popular, run the entire length of the railroad. The museum up at Palmer has one from Kennicott or from the Copper River Northwestern Railway. And you think they are kind of light little things you could just pick up and throw on and off the rail, but they are very heavy. They are solid steel.

KAREN BREWSTER: They had an engine, you didn't have to pump them?

KENNY SMITH: No, you didn't. It weren't a pump car, no. There was pump cars, but no, this was and there was a lot of those all the way to Cordova and there was at least one. I think there was maybe two more and they used speeders up there too.

KAREN BREWSTER: How many people could fit in one car?

KENNY SMITH: Oh, you could stuff a lot on it. It wasn't necessarily seats in that.

KAREN BREWSTER: How big were they? How many feet long were they?

KENNY SMITH: I guess they were probably 12 feet long or so and then it overlapped the rail a little bit, you know. So there was speeders, the make shift Model A Ford. They built these little -- they had some rail wheels and then they built these little cars with benches and facing forward and that. And so that is what they would tow you up.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that would go from McCarthy up to Kennicott then. The tracks were still there.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah. Uh-huh. Okay, now that didn't last too many years that Roaring 20 deal because in 1957 I believe it was Kennicott Copper sold the whole shebang the surface rights. Everything they had up there. The building, everything on the surface to a guy by the name of Ray Trubshaw.

KAREN BREWSTER: How do you spell his name?

KENNY SMITH: I knew you were going to ask me that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, I will look it up.

KENNY SMITH: Pretty much the way --

KAREN BREWSTER: I can find it.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah and they had a deal. This is a good question to ask Howard, but it was my understanding they had a deal with Trubshaw to tear the buildings down. They had somebody in the hierarchy of Kennicott that was paranoid over a light bill. And so part of the deal he had with them he was supposed to tear it down, burn it down, whatever, get rid of the building. But Howard would know -- I would like to talk to Howard more about that myself because he told me but I forget all that he does.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. I will ask him.

KENNY SMITH: But at any rate that is kind of the way it was and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Does that mean the tours stopped?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, yeah, just screeching halt. Even though the airline continued to get along okay with Trubshaw. We did some flying for him and that. We flew a lot of his copper out. He first off he stripped the place, you know, of any of the brass, you know. All the -- the store was falling closed, you know. He was kind of a junk dealer in a way. So he spent a few years doing that. About 1960 when I first started flying there then he took a dozer and shoved the rails off to the side so they didn't have to use that wagon

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 7 of 17

route to go to Kennicott. So he stripped that and then it was about the same time maybe the year before --'59. I am not sure which year, he punched a road through to the Bonanza all the way to the top of the mountain. And that was the first roads and he did one to the Jumbo too I believe. So that was the first time there was ever roads up there. Then when Howard and Conrad came along in '65 they didn't do much with the Jumbo, but they -- they really in '65 they really did it big up to the top of the Bonanza. They had special trucks and everything else, but it only -- that big push only lasted that one season.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they went up there looking for gold -- their --

KENNY SMITH: No, no, copper.

KAREN BREWSTER: I mean copper. I meant copper. Yeah, they weren't pushing it up there to take tourists. They were doing it for themselves.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, there was no tourists up -- the tourist show was all over and Trubshaw, you know, had stripped it down pretty much and then between different outfits, a building or two, were burnt down. There was a guy by the name of Frank Decaro. I had written about this before. We used to have a Wrangell-St. Elias News and About. Well, I had written about him. I say Frank Decaro, the man who saved Kennicott and that is true because Trubshaw wouldn't get up too often. He had -- Tim McCarthy, the reason was he said he was behind the payroll almost always, but Decaro kind of loved the place and he like all of them they came from Seattle, you know, Pioneer Square and that, and, but Decaro was -- fell in love with the place and so the only time they -- to tear that place down it was very extremely labor intensive, but that is what they started out going to do. But so they would get the crew in there early in the spring and they couldn't go up high yet because too much snow so that was the time they could tear it out. So I think it was 1960 or '61 that Decaro took the top off the mill belt. But, you know, they weren't doing it. Gee, whiz, and he didn't have a big crew anyway and so --

KAREN BREWSTER: So when you started going into the Park like in '52 when the tourist did, you remember who was living there at that time?

KENNY SMITH: In McCarthy?

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

KENNY SMITH: Well, there was a couple, the watch people. There was right on that little hill right across from the lodge that is one side Wrangell Airs going up there, there was a fellow and I wish I remembered his name. He used to come down and take us to get sodas in the winter in Cordova. He was Molly Gilmore's uncle and he was living there in '52. When he passed away, he left his place to Molly and then Molly and Tom moved up there in 1960 and they retired from their business in Cordova in 1960.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that is Molly and Tom --

KENNY SMITH: Gilmore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Gilmore, okay.

KENNY SMITH: Okay and I can't remember his name. He was living there a lot. Edwards by that time was pretty much established there. There was a -- there was a fellow by the name of -- gosh I am trying to think. He lived -- he was in the hardware store well the years I remember in the early 50's. I will think of it in a minute, but any rate he had been up there a long time. There were -- there was and that was about it. There was a couple from Cordova bought one of Kay Kennedy's houses and they were fish -- they were in

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 8 of 17

the commercial fishing business. They would spend the winters up there a lot back and forth. But they -- I don't think they started doing that until about the mid to late 50's.

KAREN BREWSTER: And there were still people prospecting at May Creek and Dan Creek and up the Nizina?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, I guess so. There was -- not so much prospecting, but the prospects were there and so the government had this deal where you had -- if you had to prospect, you had to do assessment work so, periodically and you had to record that and demonstrate that you spent money and all that. So people like Edwards would be hired to do assessment work, but these people which are old timers they would come up there a lot and go over and do the assessment work. Except for Martin Radovan, he was always prospecting, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: So Martin Radovan was still out there in the 50's when you were flying?

KENNY SMITH: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, in the 60's and he didn't get sick enough until he had to leave. You have to look at Kay's book, but it was in the early -- the last time I saw him he was a friend of these -- Akins and he came down there and lived with them and I saw him in the restaurant one day with Viola and he looked pretty good, but he had -- it was about that time they talked him into not (inaudible).

KAREN BREWSTER: So even by the 50's and 60's the country was pretty well not lived in anymore. People had come into McCarthy, other than Martin and --

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, there was very few people living there. Now in the summer it was -- there was a lot of old timers like Henry Schultz from New York. He had a prospect up at Nikolai. He would come up every summer. The most -- Archie Pollen, he was French Canadian. He owned the liquor store, not liquor store. He owned the sola fountain and the pool hall.

KAREN BREWSTER: There was a soda fountain and a pool hall?

KENNY SMITH: Yes, a big one. You can see pictures in the old days and his house the MARRS have just fixed his old house up. Right across the street from where his soda fountain was. We had a big fire in McCarthy in November of 1940 which burnt down the entire main section of town. His soda fountain went up in that, but by that time see it had been closed so there wasn't not too much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that was what I was thinking that his soda fountain and all the businesses that was shut down in '38.

KENNY SMITH: It was pretty much, yes pretty much shut down, but the post office is where the fire started and that was still a viable concern. In fact, the postmistress Ora Jackson died in the fire. Bill Berry is the name I was reaching for. Bill Berry was an oldster that spent his -- all his time there. And then so there will be a lot of these old timers come up. Now Archie would live in Seattle and he would come up every year and he lived to almost two months shy of a hundred years old. And he kept coming back and forth.

KAREN BREWSTER: And he was prospecting?

KENNY SMITH: No, no, he was the entrepreneur with the soda fountain and all that. In fact, he would take me over -- once he did anyway, and show me where his marble top was. It was cracked up in the soda fountain see.

KAREN BREWSTER: So by the time you started going to McCarthy that soda fountain and those buildings were --

KENNY SMITH: Those were all gone. They had burnt in '40. That was when I was born. But I was -- because I'd fly I don't how many times I flew Archie up and back, you know, on his summer sojourns. I always wondered though I knew he was a soda fountain, pool hall and I always wondered how he made it all in those years on that. They must have drank a lot of sodas. And then I find out that he was the biggest bootlegger in the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was going to say, his soda fountain --

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right, yeah. That was -- most of those heyday years after -- when did prohibition come in '29 or?

KAREN BREWSTER: Something like that yeah.

KENNY SMITH: Twenty-two or something like that. Yeah, well, anyway all those years there was bootlegging and there are stills and everything all over.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well and McCarthy, Kennicott was the company town and they couldn't have any of that stuff.

KENNY SMITH: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: So McCarthy in those years.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it was a sin town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it had all that stuff.

KENNY SMITH: It was a sin town.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it is interesting that he kept coming back to that, even after the place shut down he kept coming back.

KENNY SMITH: Coming back, uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the summer just to hang out there.

KENNY SMITH: And he was -- and down the Chitina there was six or seven of those old timers that had worked at Kennicott that were down. Otto Sal (phonetic) was one. He was a German. He eventually went back to Germany.

KAREN BREWSTER: And Bud Seldenridge, right?

KENNY SMITH: Well, Bud, Bud, Bud and his brother actually were raised there. I don't know if they were born there, but they would come back up all the time, but they didn't go up there and live.

KAREN BREWSTER: They didn't live in Chitina?

KENNY SMITH: No, no, they lived in Anchorage. In fact, Bud Seldenridge was an official at the FAA. He was a pilot.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's right. That's right, but they stayed in Alaska?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, they stayed in Alaska. Billy Seldenridge, you know, he still goes out there all the time. He lives in Anchorage area.

KAREN BREWSTER: It is an interesting place that people who have lived there maybe they leave, but in old age or whatever they come back.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right, right.

KAREN BREWSTER: His business was gone, but he kept coming back.

KENNY SMITH: One year his French Canadian brother came over and spent the summer there with him, but he didn't have a part in it, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: And even you, you would fly in and out of there, but you still go there. Why do you keep going there?

KENNY SMITH: Well, well why do I keep going there is because what I -- I flew those years in Chitina, you know, because that was the end of the road. You couldn't base anybody

really in McCarthy. Dad was technically the last resident pilot in McCarthy up until the modern era, contemporary times.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so like Gary.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, Gary Green, Jim actually --

KAREN BREWSTER: Jim Edwards, yeah.

KENNY SMITH: My brother let Jim live in McCarthy so he was probably the first after dad left, but and myself I was in Chitina and then flying all through the country and my personal opinion was that we didn't care that much for Chitina because it was mainly the wind. It always blows. All summer long it blows up river, you know. And so you have all the grit in the air and everything. If you go down there in the spring you will see that the mountains just right around Chitina are all gray from the Copper -- the Copper River is low and the dust is blowing up it. And, you know, it's chilly, you know, but you get -- you just get 10 minutes away or five minutes away by air and it is beautiful, you know. And so to me McCarthy I really was attracted to it and then the history of the mining era and, you know, the railroad and all that always intrigues me too. And now in later life when I see most parts of the world it is hard to -- it is hard to say the Wrangell-St. Elias and the McCarthy area isn't one of the most outstanding points in the globe. It is, you know, not that I am prejudiced, but I have just never -- I have seen a lot of places in the world that I like, but nothing is going to top that.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you decided not to settle there?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, no, you couldn't. You know, well I didn't want to live in Chitina and so we bought our house in Anchorage in '64, no in '65. Actually dad wanted me to move up and work in the mainline offices here in the winter. So we bought -- we came up in '64 and then the kids are starting getting born and so we have been here ever since. We got the same house.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you didn't like McCarthy well enough to go live there?

KENNY SMITH: Well, no. You know here is the --

KAREN BREWSTER: I guess why did you decide not too?

KENNY SMITH: Well there is nothing, you know, I had to make a living, you know and there is no way to do that in McCarthy. And really, you know, we have talked about Archie Pollen and Bill Berry and all those old timers. Jim Edwards was about the lone exception, but it was from '38 all the way up until 1974 there wasn't much in the way of people living out there or just moving in. Then -- then in the 60's there would be a few people come up and stay there. I know flying down in Cordova a lot of those in the early 70's there was a hop head guy from Cordova that was selling dope. He moved up there and got himself a -- he didn't stay there long, but he got himself a -- sorry. There was just very -- there just wasn't really anybody, so other than just a handful. And I know when Tom and Molly Gilmore lived there all winter and Jim Edwards and Maxine and the kids they were the only ones there. This is back in the 60's you know. And it was kind of driving Molly nuts because she wanted somebody to visit with other than Maxine Edwards, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: You what was Tom and Molly's last name again?

KENNY SMITH: Gilmore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's right.

KENNY SMITH: So, you know, it would -- some, you know, like Val -- Viola and Cal Akin and they would come up and spend the winters, sometimes, but there wasn't -- and then mostly in the summer there would be people that would come up and stay. There was a fellow by the name of Gordon Burdick. He had come up with Trubshaw early on and he was in and out of there. He was always trying to get a mining prospecting venture going. He was a miner, but he was mostly doing it for prospecting sake and not for trying to get rich. He was kind of a strange bird, but there was a few like him in and out, but for the most part it was not hardly. It was really just the same old, same old ghost town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, seems like a hard place to be -- to live and stay in touch especially.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, there was no revenue coming from mining operations, no way, you know, there was -- gold -- gold was -- you can't really make, you know, I don't know of anybody made a living gold mining.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well it seems like, yeah, if you lived out there, you had to do lots of different things and be very self-sufficient.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, and the things you did weren't there to make a living. You had to usually leave and then come back, you know. Like the Akins for instance they commercial fished at Cordova. Okay, so for the most part it was ghost-townish. All the way up until 1974.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what happened in 1974?

KENNY SMITH: The road came in. There was a dramatic difference between -- after 1974 and prior to 1974. Right -- they actually started punching -- the bridge at Chitina was dedicated in September of 1971, but you couldn't go very far, you know. You started running into those downed trestles. Even if you could get across the Kuskulana which you could but it was scary, you know. So, you know, it was a bridge to nowhere until '73 and they punched a road through, but they didn't finish it until November of 1973. It was late and they did an 80 pile bridges across Kennicott and across Alakana (phonetic). Now they didn't last too long at the Kennicott, but at any rate so it was maybe '73 in anticipation there was all of a sudden you saw people showing up and it was a different -- a different type of person that came in. You know, you for the most part you saw a lot of environmentalists oriented. You know we call them greenies if you want to, kind of greenie myself, but some really had strong ideals. One of the strong ideals I sort of disagreed with was that they got in -- they started getting in there after '74 and we got ours you know close the door. And so they didn't want the road to be fixed up any further and stuff like that. So there was quite a bit of animosity, you know, between those that had feelings for that had been long held to try to develop it a little bit more, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you think some of the old timers kind of were supportive of improvements and those newcomers wanted --

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, I don't know about the whole -- by that time by '74 those old timers were dying.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I meant old timer -- people who had already been living there.

KENNY SMITH: Well, Jim -- Jim would not -- Jim Edwards is a good example. He didn't want, you know. He began to moderate his views as he got older and he needed an access out other than flying his own airplane, you know, and he outlived two wives -- three -- no, he outlived two wives. Maxine got killed, but Pat died of cancer up there and he

really needed a phone system and prior to that he didn't want the phones. He didn't want anything. Then he wanted a --

KAREN BREWSTER: Then he realized he needed it.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, he needed it, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But, so he was on the side of those newcomers who didn't want the improvements?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right.

KAREN BREWSTER: But there were people who wanted the improvements and wanted (inaudible).

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, once again, there was very few people, even after '74, that stayed there year round. Even today there is very few and but they didn't for the most part the newcomers didn't want improvements. It was the rest of Alaska that did, you know. They had a couple hearings on the thing. And it would be like 97 percent in favor of putting some more money in the road, fixing up a little more and but then the three percent were being composed of people that, you know, come up and say we are locals but then a year later, you know, they are gone. They are back in California or wherever.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that kind of influx in '74, a lot of those people didn't last?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right, right. Uh-huh. Yeah, well it is kind of the story of Alaska, you know. People will come up for two or three years and says we are locals. We are hard core locals and then all of sudden they are gone, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, it was a hard place to live out there as you say.

KENNY SMITH: Kind of it is the same way down in Cordova, you know. You have heard of the Copper River Highway, you know. There was a ton of Cordova split right down the middle, you know. Half wanted the road, half didn't want the road. What I laugh about today is a lot of my friends who were almost everybody was a commercial fisherman a lot of them would say they put a road in here and we're gone. We're gone. We are moving out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why?

KENNY SMITH: Because they didn't want the highway again, people sharing their deer hunting and their moose hunting or whatever, whatever reason they didn't want, but you know what? I look back and those people are still alive. Are they there?

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

KENNY SMITH: No. You know where they are? Where there is roads. Does Cordova have a road? No.

KAREN BREWSTER: But as you get older your priorities seem to change.

KENNY SMITH: That's true. That's true. That's true.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you mentioned '75 as a real marker in how things changed. What about in 1980 when Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was established? Did that have an impact in McCarthy?

KENNY SMITH: You know, not as much as you would think, you know. Remember that out there at Tazlina they burnt up a Park airplane or somebody did because they were mad. There was this hysteria over oh the Park is here, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: And there are stories about Glennallen signs that we won't serve Park people.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, yeah.

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 13 of 17

KAREN BREWSTER: It wasn't like that in McCarthy?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, to a certain extent. They didn't put signs up and all that. It was kind of -
- but for the initially the first few years people were real leery of the Park Service. There is two things I can say about that. First off at Kennicott. Okay, Kennicott was state of the art. For some reason they even painted it. Bleakley could tell you more details why they did that but they did. When they pulled out of there, it was immaculate. Like they were going to start up the next year, you know. That was one of the, okay, so but then as years rolled by it too started to succumb. You know, like McCarthy all the buildings collapsed, rotted away because they were just low --

KAREN BREWSTER: Mother Nature takes over.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, but the stuff at Kennicott was really well put together, you know, and so it took a long time, but it was falling apart. Now to me going up there, you know, '54 was the first year I was in Kennicott --'52 is the first year in McCarthy. But it was becoming by the 60's I was really sad because the mining outfits, the newcomers had started burning buildings down like the superintendent's house, you know. Birch's house, you know, stuff like that. Bonanza bunkhouse which they burnt it down to get to the ore underneath, the way I understand anyway. At any rate, it was depressing for me. One thing, you know, Niebrugge, the artist?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

KENNY SMITH: Okay, she does a lot of good paintings up there and I got them all over my cabin. When my mom was still alive in Cordova, I would buy here one or two or three. And one time mom was telling me -- this was when she was pretty old, you know Kenny those just depress me and because it was an old wagon wheel, you know, or the mill building, you know. And I never thought of that, you know. And why it depressed her because she was there in '38 now. Thirty-eight was their last year, but what had happened in '38 they found some ore that they didn't anticipate. So that is why they didn't take all the stuff out of there.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was a boom year.

KENNY SMITH: They put that off and hauled ore and so that place is a going concern. And they had crushers, you know, for the ore down below. They had crushers up high. I think even at the intermediate part. Those things made noise. You could hear them down in McCarthy. You could hear that thing roaring in McCarthy while my mom was there. So -

KAREN BREWSTER: So the ghost town aspect depressed her?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cause she remembered it in full force.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah. Our friends like Howard did and that. They all lived in Silk Stocking Row in 1965. I flew them all of them up there and another friend of hers and we went up and had coffee there with and I know she was -- I can look back now again and I know that she was depressed, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: It had changed so much.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it was falling down. So my point here is that here comes the Park Service. I get depressed up to that point I'm depressed all the time I go up there because everything just damp moss and there is going to be another building gone. They started

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 14 of 17

stab -- they call it stabilizing, but they started restoring things and I get a positive. I get a positive feeling when I go up there today because of the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that is good. It must be nice to have a positive feeling?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it is. And okay there is another -- so another thing about the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or what the community is like now.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, well, there was one -- the Park Service themselves I am not sure what their thinking was, but they initially started out they had a management plan, a couple hearings, you know, for everyone in the Parks up here. Well, they went over to May Creek and bought a whole bunch of property over there. It wasn't private and there is going to be pretty much their headquarters inside the Park. And at one of the hearings I got up and says well, what are you doing that for, you know? We got the road into McCarthy now, you know, we need people over there at McCarthy to, you know, to do things, fix things up a little bit and that. Why are you over at May Creek isolating yourself? And the superintendent then said something about oh we have interviewed people at McCarthy and the ominous presence of the Park Service is something they want to avoid seeing all the time. The ominous presence of the Park Service. Of course, my response is who are you talking to over there? In those days I was still not retired, but I was up there all the time. I was making ten -- they never talked to me and I went to the management plan -- management hearing and things are already decided. What they would do is have these little secret meetings with people I guess -- spent a lot a time out at McCarthy. And so they went and spent all this dough at May Creek and you know what it is today? They are over at McCarthy where they should have been from the get go and they are happy about it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, May Creek did it still have a bridge across that they could get?

KENNY SMITH: No, they couldn't.

KAREN BREWSTER: So they were going to build a bridge?

KENNY SMITH: No, they weren't going to do anything. They were going to sit over there all by themselves in their little own commune.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because there used to be bridge from May Creek to cross.

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, it was there. Actually that bridge -- this will surprise a lot of people, but the Territorial Road Commission maintained a road between May Creek and McCarthy all the way up to about 1970, but after '65 you didn't need the airport over there much anymore and then they had a fellow who was an old timer he was their manager there and he had the equipment, Walt Holmes and he died the winter of '76, '77. And then his assistant, summer assistant, would come up and run it and they just quit doing it. There was somebody, like to say, that the Nizina Bridge collapsed in the earthquake. Well, it might have had some damage or something, but we were flying the DC-3 in there. We were coming over from McCarthy after that because the new McCarthy airstrip was kind of soggy in a couple of places. If we had heavy rains, it was not very good for the DC-3.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, so, yeah, you were still able to drive across that Nizina Bridge?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: It is interesting how -- this is somewhat of an aside, but how population has shifted. There used to be roads up there and bridges and there weren't very many people, but they were already --

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 15 of 17

KENNY SMITH: And still maintain the road, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: All that infrastructure was there and now that is all gone and now it just looks like wilderness to everybody.

KENNY SMITH: As a matter of fact, we mentioned Jim Edwards. He had every job known to man up there, but one stretch of summers he worked for Walt Holmes in the summer. He got the seasonal job. So he had a motorcycle in Chitina. He would commute between May Creek and Chitina. Go over and work during the day for Walt on the Nizina River.

KAREN BREWSTER: It is a long commute by motorcycle?

KENNY SMITH: Yeah, right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I was going to ask about -- I guess had -- nowadays can you talk about what the community of McCarthy is like now?

KENNY SMITH: Well, there is another little crises. There was another little crises stretch there. You have probably heard about it. It was when they put the footbridge in.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, yeah, I know that.

KENNY SMITH: And on and on and on, but any rate there was a lot of antagonism over completely shutting it down for motorized vehicle. At any rate, that evolved into what we have nowadays which everybody seems to be pretty complacent with. Thankfully they got the full vehicle bridge in which is a toll bridge. You couldn't -- nobody was really for motor vehicle -- motorhomes they, you know, Winnebago's coming in McCarthy because there is no place to park. There or Kennicott, you know, unless you are on private property. So you couldn't handle it because so but then what the businesses there desperately needed was some way to get the garbage out, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Haul fuel in.

KENNY SMITH: And especially McCarthy. You know the store and all the goods and food and pops and cases and cases. There were having a much better cross the footbridge. And boy that -- so it really even though Meg Hunt who was Ed LaChapelle's significant other, she told me one time that she was kind of once that vehicle bridge got through. They did allow the four-wheelers and that across the footbridge that everybody was about as happy as they could get. So I think that was a great thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And so as you say 1974 the types of people coming in seemed to be different. Has there been another benchmark of people are different again now?

KENNY SMITH: Well, no, other than the bridge (inaudible) thing there was -- there is -- I got a friend of mine wrote a book and he -- I think he made a mistake in his book, but it starts out with the Kennicott, the spelling Kennicott, the second vowel, you know, and this is the humorous thing about Kennicott in a way. Kennicott, you know, got -- Robert Kennicott's name is with an "i".

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

KENNY SMITH: And they named the glacier and the river after him. Okay, then in comes Kennicott -- in comes the mining company and eventually they started spelling the name of their town up there with an "e" because that is what they named their corporation. Now that goes all -- the most research I can get on it is that it really started with Birch and I think in his letter -- in a letter there was Kennicott Mining Company to start with and then in 1918 they started selling stock and it became Kennecott Copper Corporation. They kept the "e", but Birch's letterheads in 1908 was the first in his letters to Judge Wickersham were on that letterhead and that was the first misspelling.

KENNETH "KENNY" SMITH

September 6, 2016

Part 1

Page 16 of 17

KAREN BREWSTER: He just misspelled it and they kept perpetuating it?

KENNY SMITH: My personal feeling is that it was misspelled. It was an accidental thing. I -- and I based that on a number of reasons. One, what I read about Birch he wouldn't have been inclined to want it. Maybe J. P. Morgan, Pierpont Morgan would have, but Morgan was dead at the start of 1913. In 1915, they, you know, so I don't think he was having that much to say. In fact, the Titanic went down in 1912 and he was sick -- he was supposed to be on that ship because he owned the Titanic. But any rate so I don't Pierpont had anything to do with the misspelling. But I think it was just an accident. Okay, so another reason. If you read all the letters and whatnot, they are mostly letters from back then, they never referred to the fines -- the copper fines up there as Kennicott. They referred to them as the Copper River copper. They used the Copper River, you know. And those were a probably good reason. You were talking to people that, you know, Kennicott wasn't (inaudible), but the Copper River is one of the major rivers in Alaska and it was only big copper fine on the Copper River drainage, you know. And so they would -- I always see the Copper River. So here comes Birch and they decided well what are we going to name this mining company and will betcha they thought well, we got to narrow it down a little more than just Copper River Mining, you know. And I think, well, it is on the Kennicott Glacier, why not Kennicott and they just misspelled it. Okay, so --

KAREN BREWSTER: Wait, before you continue that is a good spot to take a little pause.

End of Part 1